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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AGIL KHALIL FRUSTRATED BY GOAJ'S "BLACK PR
CAMPAIGN" AGAINST HIM

REF: A. BAKU 167
[1](#)B. BAKU 257
[1](#)C. BAKU 336

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION DONALD LU PER 1.4(C,D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a April 24 meeting, opposition Azadliq newspaper correspondent Agil Khalil told Poloff that the GOAJ's investigation into his case was "fake and biased." He said he would not participate in further questioning or in court should the case go to trial. Khalil expressed frustration with the "black PR campaign" against him, noting that he has filed lawsuits against the TV stations which have broadcast false information. Khalil maintains that MNS agents were involved in the attacks against him, and heard that the First Family had been squabbling over the Olive Gardens, where the initial attack on Khalil had occurred. Although his health has improved, Khalil is under a lot of stress, and believes that his phone line is being monitored and that he is being followed. END SUMMARY

KHALIL REFUSES FURTHER PGO QUESTIONING

[1](#)2. (C) Opposition Azadliq newspaper correspondent Agil Khalil opened an April 24 meeting with Poloff by stating that the GOAJ's "fake" investigation into his case -- including the February 22 incident in which he was physically assaulted (ref a) and the March 13 incident in which he was stabbed (ref b) -- was biased. For that reason, he said he refused to participate in any further questioning by the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) and would not participate if the case went to trial. Khalil said he had changed his phone number so the authorities no longer can reach him, but investigators continued to contact his friends and relatives for questioning. According to Khalil, during questioning, the investigators force his friends and relatives to sign confidentiality agreements, and then proceed to ask them

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"weird" questions about his personality.

[1](#)3. (C) Khalil characterized the many press reports alleging that he was stabbed by his homosexual ex-lover, Sergey Strekali, as a "black PR campaign" against him. He said he has filed civil defamation lawsuits against Space TV, Lider TV, AzTV, and ATV, and was considering filing a suit against Prosecutor General Zakir Garalov, whom Khalil said admitted that he had ordered the "black PR campaign." Noting that the U.S. Embassy had been the first to take an interest, Khalil thanked the Embassy for its attention to his case. However, he said, he did not understand why, despite intense international pressure on the GOAJ regarding his case, the GOAJ not only continued the "black PR campaign," but had

become more aggressive.

ALLEGED GOAJ INVOLVEMENT

¶4. (C) Khalil said he was certain the attacks against him were connected to the Ministry of National Security (MNS). Without revealing his source, Khalil said he had received the names of two MNS agents whom he claims were responsible for his February 22 assault -- Akif Chovdarov and Daghbayi Allahverdiyev -- but did not publicly release them because at the time, he had been confident that the investigation was going well. Further, Khalil said he was being followed after the February 22 incident, and had recognized one individual -- whom he believed to be affiliated with the MNS -- on four separate occasions. On the evening of March 13, Khalil said he saw that same person with another unidentified individual on the corner of the street outside the government printing house (in which Azadliq's office is located) and that the two proceeded to follow him. Khalil began to run, then was attacked and stabbed by two other individuals. He believes the four were working together, and that there were others in the area who were involved, including two cars which he said followed the car that took him to the hospital.

¶5. (C) Khalil confirmed that at the time of the second attack, he had been continuing to investigate the situation surrounding the Olive Gardens. He is certain that the two attacks were connected. Just two hours prior to his stabbing, Khalil said he had published an article alleging that the MNS was involved in the first attack. During the course of his investigation, Khalil said he heard that the Olive Gardens had been the subject of a dispute among the First Family. Former President Heydar Aliyev's relatives -- most prominently, current President Ilham Aliyev's uncle, Jalal Aliyev -- and First Lady Mehriban Aliyev's relatives, the Pashayevs, both reportedly had wanted the property. Now,

Khalil said, as a result of the fallout in the aftermath of the February 22 incident in the Olive Gardens, he heard that the Pashayevs had won the dispute.

INVESTIGATION GOING NOWHERE

¶6. (C) Prior to the March 13 incident, Khalil said Baku's Seventh District Police Station had been investigating the February 22 incident, but no criminal case had been opened. During that time, Khalil said he was offered money by two different persons to keep quiet and "make peace." The first was "pocket opposition" Justice Party member Elkhan Shukurlu; the second was the Chief of Baku's Seventh District Police Station, whose first name is Jeyhun (he did not know the Chief's surname). It was unclear to Khalil how either individual was connected to the assailants, but in both instances, he said he understood they were seeking to act as intermediaries. Khalil refused the money in both instances. Once the case was transferred to the Baku City Police Department (which he said was a result of the Embassy's efforts), Khalil said he was confident that police were conducting a serious investigation. Referring to the police's April 1 arrest of Olive Gardens owner Natiq Allahverdiyev (whom Khalil says is the brother of one of the MNS agents who beat him), Khalil agreed that it was connected to his case, but said he wanted those responsible for the actual assault to be identified and prosecuted.

¶7. (C) After he was stabbed on March 13, Khalil said that his case was transferred to the PGO and the MNS, at which point all real efforts ceased. Further, Khalil said he was beaten by PGO officials on two occasions: on April 3 by Ali Guliyev, a PGO investigator who had traveled to Kurdemir to question Khalil and his family, and on April 4 by an investigator named Elman in the PGO's Serious Crimes Department (he did not know the investigator's surname). According to Khalil, the investigators slapped him, beat him on the abdomen, slammed his fingers in a door, and covered his mouth with a cellophane-like material which prevented him

from breathing. He has filed a complaint with Prosecutor General Zakir Garalov, and understands that Garalov's Deputy is looking into the situation. Khalil said that the PGO has been trying to distract the public from the February 22 incident, turning local media attention to the "black PR campaign" against him. Khalil has no hope that the investigation will uncover what really happened on February 22 or March 13. The GOAJ was not investigating the crimes committed, Khalil said; rather, it was searching for ways to tarnish his reputation.

STREKALI'S INVOLVEMENT?

18. (C) Clearly sensitive to the allegations regarding his sexual orientation, Khalil briefly touched upon Sergey Strekali's statements. During the periods of questioning at the PGO, Khalil said Strekali's testimony was full of inconsistencies. For example, he said, the phone number Strekali listed as Khalil's number several years ago was not Khalil's number until 2007. Bewildered, Khalil said that even when he insisted to Strekali that he had not stabbed Khalil, Strekali countered, "Yes I did!" According to Khalil, the police keep persons like Strekali on deck to use in cases for the GOAJ's benefit. He said that he heard Strekali was a drug dealer who supplied illegal substances to police officers and Members of Parliament. Khalil did not know why Strekali would agree to deliver false testimony, but he was certain that the GOAJ was using Strekali.

KHALIL HEALTHY BUT NERVOUS

19. (C) Khalil said that after being released from the Baku hospital where he underwent surgery, he received follow-on care at a hospital in his home region of Kurdemir. He said physically, he was feeling much better, but he was under a lot of stress because of the "black PR campaign" against him.

Khalil reported that he still feels as if he is being followed, and although his phone number has changed, he believes the authorities "have control" of his line. Khalil believes that the attacks against him are part of a broader campaign against Azadliq newspaper, pointing to the imprisonment of Azadliq Editor-In-Chief Ganimat Zahid on a conviction including "holiganism" and of Azadliq satirical journalist Mrza Sakit on a conviction of narcotics possession as similar "black PR campaigns." (In addition to the imprisonments Khalil listed, two other Azadliq newspaper correspondents have been attacked during the last two years,

and the newspaper forcibly was evicted from its office in November 2006.)

COMMENT

10. (C) Khalil is correct in noting that Azadliq newspaper has been subject to a tremendous amount of pressure over the past few years, arguably more than any other publication. The attacks on Khalil, however, stand out, because unlike the other journalists subject to attacks, lawsuits, or imprisonment, Khalil was not a prominent journalist, and he previously had not written anything particularly controversial. Khalil's attacks are more likely to be a result of his unwitting involvement in a powerful person's pursuit for economic gain.

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